

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIRST PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Thursday, 25 March 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President:

Mr. Nguyen Quy Binh

(Viet Nam)

The President: I declare open the 821st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like at the outset to extend, on behalf of all of us, a warm welcome to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno, and the Commissioner of the Federal Government for Disarmament and Arms Control of Germany, H.E. Ambassador Rüdiger Hartmann, who will be addressing the Conference today. Their presence among us yet again today testifies to the abiding commitment of their Governments to our common endeavours and to the continued importance they attach to our forum.

I should also like to welcome among us the newly appointed representative of Australia to the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Les Luck, and assure him of our full cooperation and support in the discharge of his functions.

I invite the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno, to address the Conference.

Mrs. MORENO (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, I am happy to convey to you our pleasure at seeing you preside over the work of the Conference on Disarmament, and to offer you the support of my delegation in discharging your responsibilities, which I am sure you will do with the skill born of your extensive experience and abilities. We are grateful to you and your predecessors, the Ambassadors of the United States and Venezuela, for your efforts to enable the Conference on Disarmament to begin substantive work.

About a year ago, I had the honour to address this Conference in order to express my Government's concern over the stalemate which had been affecting this sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations since 1997 and which in our view was a reflection of the lack of consensus in the international community concerning a global disarmament agenda in the post-cold-war era. At that time, I pointed out the continuing validity of the Declaration and Programme of Action set forth in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, adopted more than 20 years ago, and stated that the present detente should facilitate the achievement of their lofty objectives. I recalled that, today as then, the priority in disarmament negotiations is nuclear weapons, which continue to pose a threat to humanity's very existence. Last year, after many delays, the Conference succeeded in adopting a programme of work and - just - embarking on substantive work. This year, the first part of its annual session is about to conclude and the Conference has still not been able to continue what it started or to initiate new tasks. So I have returned to reiterate the Mexican Government's concern that in the field of disarmament not only has no progress been made since last year but also new concerns and strains relating to previous accomplishments have appeared on the horizon.

Thus, the risk that nuclear weapons may be used by accident or miscalculation or without authorization has not diminished but rather increased. Six years after its signature, the Start II Treaty has yet to enter into force. There have been no changes in the strategic or security

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doctrines of the nuclear-weapon States that would point to a reduction in the role they assign to those weapons, nor have those States undertaken an unequivocal commitment to the speedy and total elimination of their respective nuclear weapons.

On the contrary, additional States have demonstrated a nuclear weapon capability, at the expense of the international non-proliferation regime in this area, whose universality and strengthening is essential for international security. Furthermore, research on anti-missile defences has been announced, raising concern over whether its outcome will be compatible with the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, better known as the ABM Treaty, which is regarded as the cornerstone of efforts to reduce nuclear stockpiles.

The outlook for nuclear disarmament is not encouraging, above all because of the continuing refusal to deal with it multilaterally, with the thoroughness and rigour it merits; a refusal which casts doubts on how, when and to what extent the nuclear-weapon States are willing to fulfil their treaty obligations, and to assume the special responsibility they bear to pursue systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating them.

The perception that the negotiations on the reduction of nuclear stockpiles are deadlocked, as well as the prospect of the indefinite possession of those weapons, could ultimately weaken the international community's accomplishments, not only with regard to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also in relation to the total elimination of other weapons of mass destruction. These are treaties which are certainly very valuable in themselves, and, as laid down in their preambles, were conceived and concluded as essential elements and steps in pursuing general and complete disarmament, a goal that is receding as hope dwindles in its manifest premise - a nuclear-weapon-free world.

These and other considerations led my Government to join those of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden and South Africa in the declaration issued by our Ministers for Foreign Affairs on 9 June last year, concerning the need for a new nuclear disarmament agenda, which resulted in resolution 53/77 Y, adopted in the United Nations General Assembly by a large majority, relating to bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral mutually reinforcing measures and calling upon this Conference to establish an appropriate subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament.

Some of these practical steps must be taken urgently in order to reduce the nuclear-weapon States' reliance on these weapons in their security systems. This includes agreements between nuclear-weapon States not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and not to use or threaten to use them against non-nuclear-weapon States. These agreements would be in keeping with the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on the legality of the use of nuclear weapons, and would facilitate other measures of equal urgency for the security of all, such as the de-alerting of nuclear weapons and the removal of nuclear warheads from their delivery systems. This latter measure

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has become even more pressing in the light of concerns over the threat of the Y2K virus to the safety of nuclear weapons in a state of alert.

The Group of 21, of which Mexico is a member, has tabled proposals for the establishment of a subsidiary body of the Conference to deal with nuclear disarmament, and has displayed flexibility regarding its characteristics and mandate. It is the understanding of my delegation that an exchange of views and information in the Conference on Disarmament with a view to identifying specific measures for achieving nuclear disarmament does not affect or impair efforts to reduce nuclear weapons worldwide. Obviously no one claims that we can replace those efforts here. It is hard to understand, however, the systematic refusal to deal with nuclear disarmament, as though it were the sole responsibility or concern of some States.

As the International Court of Justice has already pointed out, the obligation to pursue and bring to a conclusion negotiations on nuclear disarmament is incumbent upon all States. In article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, each party to the Treaty undertook to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament. By insisting on the need for a new agenda on nuclear disarmament and on the establishment by this sole multilateral forum for disarmament of an appropriate subsidiary body to deal with this issue, Mexico is fulfilling part of this commitment.

There is one measure in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament that was identified some time ago. I am referring to a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, on the basis of the Special Coordinator's report and the mandate contained therein. It is the second and last practical measure provided for in the programme of action appearing in the decision on "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament" adopted by the NPT Review and Extension Conference in 1995.

Last year, at the end of its session, the Conference established the Ad Hoc Committee on this subject, which has still not managed to restart substantive work this year. Negotiations in this sphere are technically complex, and agreement and consensus on its scope are still lacking. Mexico believes the treaty should be a true measure of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament which is urgent. Neither consensus on scope nor a clear idea on the technical complexities involved can even be approached unless negotiations begin.

Despite the significance we attach to the creation of subsidiary bodies to deal with nuclear disarmament, we must not sacrifice what is possible for what may be desirable. It would appear that no one objects to the Ad Hoc Committee on fissile material commencing its work. The time has come to begin negotiations, the *raison d'être* of this Conference.

Outer space should be explored and used solely for peaceful purposes. That is what we agreed in 1967. However, since then technology in this field as in others has made exponential progress. The potential military uses of outer space are becoming more numerous and significant day by day, just as the

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number of countries with the capability to use it is on the increase. Last year, the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed that it is incumbent upon this Conference to play a leading role in the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects, and invited it to finalize the examination of the mandate in its 1992 decision with a view to re-establishing the Ad Hoc Committee at the present session. This is another question on which we should and can reach the necessary consensus speedily.

Last year, the Ad Hoc Committee on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons was re-established, and structured and thematic discussions on various related topics were held. It was agreed to recommend to the Conference that it should re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee at the beginning of the present session, the first part of which is about to end. This is another question that inexplicably remains unresolved.

Mexico believes that it is necessary to redouble efforts to conclude at the earliest possible date the work of the Ad Hoc Group on a verification protocol for the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological Weapons. Greater flexibility in negotiations will be required in order to resolve pending issues.

On 23 September 1998, together with 59 States parties to the Convention, Mexico subscribed to a declaration supporting the conclusion of the negotiations. This declaration included two elements which continue to be of importance for my country: the resulting protocol must be in keeping with all the elements of the mandate received by the Ad Hoc Group; and the protocol must be concluded on the basis of consensus.

My Government hopes that all the measures envisaged in the verification mechanism will be effective and economical and that a balance will be struck between commitments to be entered into and international cooperation measures in the area of biotechnology and the transfer of equipment related to the peaceful uses of biological agents.

The excessive accumulation of conventional weapons, the growing destructive power of conventional weapons and the unlimited availability of small arms and light weapons, as well as their illegal trafficking, pose challenges and threats to security. Of course, the poor prospects for nuclear disarmament are not encouraging either for conventional disarmament or for the adoption of confidence-building measures at the global level. We feel that the prospects are better and broader at the regional level, and Mexico has taken initiatives in this regard, of which the CD has been informed. Examples are the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials and the work of the Ad Hoc Group on the limitation of conventional armaments, set up by the Rio Group, which held its second meeting in Mexico City on 15 and 16 February this year.

We are participating actively in the Group of Experts which will submit a report to the next General Assembly on the progress made with the set of

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recommendations approved in 1997 by Member States for the reduction and prevention of excessive accumulations of small arms. We attach great importance to the holding of an international conference not later than 2001, for we believe it will offer an opportunity to explore the various aspects of this issue and to agree on a programme of action at the international level.

The fact that the Conference on Disarmament has demonstrated its inability to respond to its priorities should not lead it into the temptation of duplicating efforts that are being carried out successfully in other forums. The logical context for dealing with the illicit trade in firearms at the international level is the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Transfers of anti-personnel landmines constitute an issue to be tackled by the follow-up machinery of the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons. For these topics the Conference on Disarmament lacks the necessary expertise and experience, and its decision-making mechanisms are not appropriate. Airing them in this forum does not further progress on the issues, nor does it help the Conference on Disarmament to pursue its responsibilities and priorities.

Experience gained since the negotiations on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty were concluded, almost three years ago, during which we have failed to embark on sustained substantive work, suggests that our working methods should be reviewed to adapt them to current international realities and the doubling of our membership.

A year ago, we also expressed our support for the proposal that any subsidiary bodies we set up which have not fulfilled their mandates should not require a political decision to be taken each year in order to be re-established. Until we review and agree on working methods to make our task easier, we should apply rigorously the rules of procedure that we have set ourselves and are in force. If, at the beginning of a session, consensus is not reached on the establishment of the subsidiary bodies required for initiating negotiations, special coordinators should be appointed to carry out the necessary consultations for the consensus in question, and mechanisms should be established or re-established immediately for the substantive work already agreed upon.

I wish to reiterate Mexico's full support for the immediate admission to this Conference of the five countries put forward in the report of the Special Coordinator on expansion: Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia. Their inclusion will enhance the Conference's representativeness and legitimacy, both of which lose from the unexplained delays in taking the decision.

The deadlock in this sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament is worrying but not surprising. The Conference is not set apart from events in the international arena, which would seem to indicate that the detente we have enjoyed during this decade is under threat. Obviously, we can only hope to make progress in the field of disarmament if States, in their relations with one another, renounce the use or threat of force, except in the cases laid down in the United Nations Charter, bring their conduct into line with

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generally accepted principles and rules of international law and strengthen the institutions that the international community has set up to maintain international peace and security.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Mexico for her important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now invite the Commissioner of the Federal Government for Disarmament and Arms Control of Germany, His Excellency Ambassador Rüdiger Hartmann, to address the Conference.

Mr. HARTMANN (Germany): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you most warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You may count on the full support of the German delegation in your efforts to reach a decision on the start of substantive negotiations at this Conference. I should also like to thank your predecessors, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States of America and Ambassador Victor Rodríguez Cedeño of Venezuela, for their efforts, which hopefully will come to fruition at last under your presidency. I also want to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the secretariat staff for their unfailing professional and effective assistance to the work of the Conference.

When I had the honour to speak to this Conference on 30 July last year, I felt a spirit of optimism and new departure which was subsequently confirmed by the decision to start cut-off negotiations on the basis of the Shannon mandate. This time my mood is rather one of disappointment in view of the fact that, in spite of this decision, it has not been possible to come to an agreement on the CD's programme of work during the first part of this year's session, due to controversies on nuclear issues. That is most unfortunate. In our view, whether the CD will be able to play a role at the turn of the new millennium will depend on its ability to effectively address the topical issue of nuclear weapons. But in the future it will also have to address the problem of conventional weapons, which are killing hundreds of men, women and children every day in the world's crisis areas. After decades of disarmament efforts, one could say that, with regard to weapons of mass destruction, this Conference and its predecessors have achieved remarkable results: the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, to mention just the most important ones. In contrast, little attention has been paid to conventional arms. The Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments has not been re-established since 1995, although in our view the work that remains to be done in this area is considerable. Although the "decatalogue" agreed upon 20 years ago contains the item "conventional weapons", it has not been possible to put this subject on the CD agenda. We firmly believe that the CD must now develop a more balanced agenda which includes conventional weapons. I shall thus also address some topics today to which the German Government attaches great importance, which go beyond the scope of your present discussions.

Nuclear non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons remain high on the German Government's list of priorities, in particular after the very discomfoting and dangerous developments which took place in this field

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last year. We believe that, in this regard, the CD could make two important contributions at this stage. For a long time, Germany has supported the idea of creating a mechanism allowing a structured exchange of information and views on nuclear disarmament. We are aware of the widely divergent positions on this issue. As a compromise, we have introduced, together with Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway, the proposal to create an ad hoc working group which would be tasked with such an exchange. The proposal reflects our best judgment on what might find consensus, at this point, within the Conference. While we are not firmly attached to every word of it, we do believe that it contains a carefully crafted balance and therefore should not be watered down or overburdened with additional elements.

Germany also believes that the most important and immediate contribution that the CD can now make to fostering nuclear disarmament is to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. These negotiations will clearly be difficult and complex. Let me share with you some reflections on the key aspects of this project.

First, we believe that an FMCT will make a contribution not only to nuclear non-proliferation but also to nuclear disarmament. Both are intimately related; one should therefore not waste time on an academic debate on whether an FMCT is part of disarmament or of non-proliferation. The process of nuclear disarmament will, at some stage, have to control and reduce all fissile material available for military purposes. The first step in this direction is to effectively prevent its further accumulation. Whether further steps can already be included in an FMCT remains to be seen in the course of negotiations. But the need for further steps to be taken cannot be an excuse for not starting with the first.

Second, it is generally agreed that the FMCT must be non-discriminatory. This implies that, in contrast to the NPT, the FMCT will not make distinctions between different categories of States. It also implies that verification obligations and the level of assurance provided by the verification system will have to be equal for all States parties. In other words, the FMCT will have to create the same legally binding verification obligations for nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, whether they are parties to the NPT or not. The FMCT will thereby contribute to reducing the discriminatory elements which are part of the present non-proliferation regime.

Third, effective verification of an FMCT is, in our view, based on two requirements. One is that the verification regime must provide a high level of assurance against contravention. The other is that costs must be reasonable. Any duplication of safeguards must therefore be avoided. The FMCT should not impose new burdens and costs on States already subject to an extended full-scope safeguard regime. From our point of view, this question will be of key importance in the future negotiations.

Fourth, previous progress in nuclear disarmament has led to the existence of considerable stockpiles of fissile material in excess of military needs. States in possession of such stockpiles should commit themselves to

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measures which would enhance transparency and foster the irreversible reduction of such stockpiles. In the meantime, States concerned which have not yet done so should stop any further production of fissile material and apply IAEA safeguards to excess material. It will also be necessary, and become even more so as nuclear disarmament continues, to warrant, by effective verification of their destruction or safe storage, that these stockpiles are never used again for the production of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We welcome the ongoing discussions between major nuclear States and with IAEA to find solutions in this respect. Some argue that the FMCT could not make a contribution in this area because excess fissile material is a result of specific nuclear disarmament negotiations or unilateral decisions. But the FMCT should, at the very least, create a system of safeguards against the use of any fissile material which is prohibited under its scope. It is particularly in this respect that an FMCT could make a contribution to ensuring that nuclear disarmament is irreversible.

Finally, it should be possible to adapt the provisions of the FMCT to deal with changing conditions. In the years following its conclusion, large stockpiles of nuclear warheads and of military fissile material will continue to exist. Accordingly, verification provisions will have to take this situation into account. But the FMCT should also be capable of addressing future developments through which such stockpiles will be drastically reduced. The level of assurances now considered appropriate may seem insufficient once nuclear stockpiles have reached much lower levels because by then the production of fissile material will be much more dangerous than it is now. Therefore, the FMCT should have enough built-in flexibility. Its verification regime could thus evolve in the course of time, just as the NPT safeguard system has been and still is developing.

These are our basic considerations at this stage with regard to the FMCT negotiations. I should now like to turn to another important arms control effort under way here in Geneva, though outside the scope of this Conference: the negotiations on a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. Germany has consistently supported efforts to strengthen the Convention, from the first deliberations on possible measures within the VEREX group of experts to today's negotiations in the Ad Hoc Group. With our partners in the European Union we share the view that 1999 is going to be a crucial year in this field. In order to meet the target date of the year 2000 set by the Fourth Review Conference of the BWC, it is imperative to complete substantial work on the protocol by the end of this year. In our capacity as Friend of the Chair on Confidentiality, we will actively support the efforts made by the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Group, Ambassador Tóth, to move towards the rapid and successful conclusion of these negotiations.

Under Germany's presidency, the European Union has just completed negotiations on a draft of a third Common Position within the framework of its Common Foreign and Security Policy, which will build on two previous Common Positions of 1996 and 1998. EU members thereby hope to inject fresh momentum into the negotiations in Geneva. In their new Common Position they will set ambitious but realistic and achievable goals for the Geneva negotiations. We expect the draft Common Position to be adopted by the EU Council in May this

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year. It is, however, already clear that it will contain considerably more detailed elements in the field of on-site measures or visits than hitherto, for example new details on clarification procedures. The Common Position will also call for specific measures of international cooperation and assistance in the field of biotechnology.

In the four years of its existence, the Ad Hoc Group has assembled important elements of a protocol. Declarations of relevant facilities and activities, coupled with appropriate follow-up measures, will enhance transparency and strengthen confidence with regard to compliance. To promote the accuracy of declarations, clarification procedures would allow for possible errors or omissions to be addressed. Wherever necessary, investigations must rapidly and effectively address non-compliance concerns. International cooperation in the peaceful use of biotechnology and technical assistance in the implementation of the protocol will contribute to transparency and confidence-building. The elements that have been developed must now be refined, structured and put into treaty language. The time has come to accomplish this work speedily and to make sure that biological weapons, which in the future might constitute the greatest threat to mankind, are reliably and effectively banned at the beginning of the next millennium.

I should like to move on to conventional arms control, and specifically to two subjects of interest to this Conference, namely, APMs and small arms and light weapons. Germany has consistently supported the goal of a complete ban on anti-personnel mines. Back in April 1996, at the Geneva Review Conference on Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Germany unilaterally declared her renunciation of APMs. The destruction of German APM stockpiles, which amounted to 2.17 million items, was completed in 1998. Germany has also voluntarily destroyed 1.38 million anti-tank mines which became surplus after the end of the cold war and which, of course, are not covered by the Ottawa agreement.

Germany welcomes the recent entry into force of amended Protocol II of the CCW Convention. The comprehensive ban on APMs as provided for in the Ottawa Convention, however, is in our view the most credible means to combat the humanitarian problems caused by this scourge of mankind. Germany, together with France, was among the first States parties to submit her instrument of ratification to the United Nations Secretary-General on 23 July last year. We wholeheartedly welcome the entry into force of the Convention after a surprisingly short period, which demonstrated States' determination to stop the vicious circle by which new APMs were laid even before old minefields could be cleared, even though every effort was being made to do so. We look forward to the first conference of States parties to be held in Maputo in the first week of May and would like to thank the Government of Mozambique for hosting it. The European Union, which, in the framework of its Common Foreign and Security Policy, has adopted a Joint Action on APMs, will continue to make maximum financial and practical efforts, particularly in the field of mine clearing.

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One other primordial task is now to make acceptance of the Ottawa Convention and its objectives as universal as possible. We are aware that a number of States, including some large military Powers and major regional Powers with large APM stockpiles and significant production capabilities, have decided not to adhere to the Ottawa Convention immediately. Many of them, however, have expressed their willingness to contribute to the resolution of the humanitarian aims of the Ottawa Convention by banning APM transfers. Germany, therefore, strongly supports the establishment of an ad hoc committee on APMs by the CD and an early start to negotiations banning APM transfers. Such an agreement will, of course, have to be fully compatible with the Ottawa Convention and strengthen its objectives.

In many regions of the world, the excessive and uncontrolled accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons pose a threat to peace and security and reduce the prospects for sustainable development. The problem has such dimensions that it requires a concerted and comprehensive approach which aims, on the one hand, to drastically reduce the huge uncontrolled stocks of these weapons in crisis areas and, on the other, to effectively prevent their continued influx. As the problem of small arms has many roots, which may vary from region to region, a differentiated approach which includes preventive as well as reactive measures is called for.

Within the framework of its Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU adopted a Joint Action on small arms and light weapons in December last year. The countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia have associated themselves with this Joint Action. Its text has been distributed to you this morning. In this Joint Action, the EU committed itself to combating any destabilizing accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons, cooperating to reduce existing accumulations of these weapons down to levels consistent with the respective countries' legitimate security needs, and helping to solve the problems caused by such accumulations. For the future, the EU plans - wherever possible in cooperation with afflicted countries and with other relevant international institutions - to carry out concrete projects which aim to reduce the number of surplus weapons. Furthermore, the EU intends to contribute to building consensus on the above-mentioned objectives and principles in relevant regional and international forums as a basis for regional incremental approaches and, where appropriate, on global instruments on small arms and light weapons. The European Union has already, through worldwide démarches, set out the purpose of its Joint Action to other Governments and asked for their support. First responses have been overwhelmingly positive. I am very happy to be able to use this opportunity to request again your Governments' cooperation in this field. On behalf of the European Union, I would like to ask the secretariat to circulate the text of the Joint Action as an official document of the CD.

At the beginning of my address, I used the word "disappointment" to describe my Government's feeling about the state of affairs in this Conference. In fact, the Conference reached a decision to establish an ad hoc

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committee to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty four years ago, back in 1995. When, three years later, after the conclusion of the CTBT negotiations and two years of protracted consultations, the Conference reached a decision on an FMCT ad hoc committee, we expected that finally things would move forward. This decision has now been called into question again. It seems that decisions of this Conference, taken on the basis of consensus among the representatives of 60 nations, have a very short lifespan. Can one expect that such a course of action or rather non-action will be acceptable to the international community? Can one expect parliaments and the public at large not to voice criticism in the harshest terms? One should not be surprised if the debate on nuclear issues moves to other forums. I therefore appeal to all delegations here to cooperate in a spirit of compromise and flexibility to agree on a work programme and to make it operational at the beginning of your spring session.

May I finally draw your attention to the unresolved issue of CD expansion? A decision on the proposal of Ambassador Hofer is long overdue. We strongly urge that the Conference proceed to a decision without further delay, which will allow us to welcome Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia to this Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Commissioner of the Federal Government for Disarmament and Arms Control of Germany for his important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Majoor.

Mr. MAJOOR (Netherlands): Mr. President, since it is the first time that I speak under your tenure, allow me first to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency at this crucial time towards the end of our first session of the year. You can count on the full support of my delegation in your commendable efforts to move the Conference towards substantive work. I would like to include in my thanks your predecessors during this session, Ambassadors Grey and Cedeño. I would also like to warmly welcome our new colleagues from South Africa, France and Australia. My delegation looks very much forward to continuing to work closely together with them and with their delegations. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Mexican Under-Secretary, Ambassador Carmen Moreno, and the German Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control, Ambassador Rüdiger Hartmann, for their - as always - substantive and thought-provoking contributions to our discussions.

I take the floor briefly to inform the Conference that my Government deposited on 23 March - the day before yesterday - its instrument of ratification of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, thus becoming the thirty-first State which has now ratified the CTBT.

We have also completed the procedures for parliamentary approval of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, better known as the Ottawa

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treaty. We expect to deposit our instrument of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the next few weeks, well before the First Conference of States Parties to the Treaty that will take place in the beginning of May in Maputo.

And lastly we expect in the coming few days to deposit in New York our consent to be bound by Protocols II and IV of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his important announcement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. KESKINTEPE (Turkey): Mr. President, in the absence of my Ambassador, allow me to extend to you our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

It was not our intention to take the floor this morning. However, in view of the statements by two distinguished speakers, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Mexico and the German Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control, reminding us that we have still to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on FMCT after - I might add - an exhausting 10 weeks without result, and calling on the CD to begin negotiations, my delegation would like to associate itself with this sentiment. We believe that delicate compromises, reached after painstaking efforts by all delegations, should not be sacrificed in the name of linkages which have proved unproductive. We earnestly hope that the necessary flexibility and a spirit of compromise will be displayed by all delegations at the start of the second part of this year's session so that the Conference would expeditiously begin FMCT negotiations.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Turkey for his statement. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to share some of my feelings.

We have reached the end of the first part of our annual session without being able to translate our agenda into a practical programme of work. Neither the intensive efforts of my two predecessors, Ambassador Grey of the United States of America and Ambassador Rodríguez Cedeño of Venezuela, nor my own attempts aimed at developing a consensus on how to deal with the two outstanding issues on our programme of work, namely, nuclear disarmament and prevention of an arms race in outer space, have yet resulted in a formula acceptable to all which would allow us to start our substantive work. The difficulties we are faced with are known to all. What is now required is for all of us to make full use of the inter-sessional period in order to intensify our consultations with a view to bridging the existing divergence of views. You can rest assured that, on my part, I will spare no effort in exploring all possible avenues which would allow the Conference to fully play its role as the sole negotiating forum of the international community.

(The President)

As agreed, we will hold a plenary meeting tomorrow at 3.30 p.m. sharp, at which the President of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr. Jiang Zemin, will address the Conference. In this connection, I should again like to remind all delegations that, on that occasion, stringent security measures will be in force, and I would kindly request that they carry their United Nations identity badges with them and be present in the Council Chamber at 3.15 p.m.

This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held tomorrow, Friday 26 March 1999, at 3.30 p.m.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.